

The Dandelion Club

by Infinite Drops of Rain

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Summary: They're the outcasts of their clans. Neglected. Forgotten. And miserably lonely, with problems they can't hope to fix by themselves. Four young cats meet and work together to pick up the pieces of their twisted, broken lives, meeting in secret every moon. These cats call themselves the Dandelion Club, after the hated weeds that, against all odds, keep on going and growing.

1. Chapter 1

****Author's Note:** hey guys! After a 3-4 month hiatus, I'm pleased to say that I'm back! Unfortunately, I'm cancelling Prove To You. The plot was atrocious and planned out horribly. I'm not sure I even planned it out at all. I AM trying to keep this story alive until the end, however! I've taken major precautions: actually planning/writing out the plot (kudos to you, Infinite, for doing the blindingly obvious), planning out the characters' personalities (whoa! Look! Something else I wasn't doing before that I should've done!) and planning out what the chapters are going to be about beforehand. Kinda. Smooth, Infinite. Real smooth. Also, I swear I wasn't trying to copy Trinity (the TV series), as they also have a Dandelion Club. It was a coincidence. The idea came to me what... a year or so ago, I'd say, while I was being all moody and existential and watching dandelions in my backyard. ******

While everybody else at the Gathering was mingling together and sharing tongues with old friends, Pebbleclaw sat to the side: the outcast of WindClan.

The scarred tom was stone-still, but his alertness showed in his pricked ears, his narrowed gaze, and his unsheathed claws. He watched as his younger brother joked with a group of ThunderClan apprentices. They were all smaller than his brother. Clearly innocent. There was no danger of Gorsefoot being attacked here. Pebbleclaw relaxed, but only slightly, and he kept his claws unsheathed, just in case.

Pebbleclaw had no intention of joining anybody in their conversations. They wouldn't have let him, anyway. But miraculously, two giggly RiverClan she-cats approached him. The smaller one, a pretty tortoiseshell, stole a glance at him and blushed when their eyes met. They obviously didn't know who he was.

She sat down next to him. "Hi!" she meowed, her voice shrill and loud. "I'm Flowerpaw, but most call me beautiful instead." She laughed. "Get it? Because I'm pretty?"

_StarClan, this she-cat is annoying, _thought Pebbleclaw irritably. He didn't bother to put on a fake smile at her joke.

When the handsome tabby tom failed to react, Flowerpaw frowned. "Heyy," she whined. "No need to be rude. But that's okay!" she added, suddenly brightening up. "I'll just talk, and you can listen. You're one of the strong, stoic types, right? I bet. You certainly look the part." Flowerpaw, the silly she-cat, fluttered her eyelashes.

Pebbleclaw hissed under his breath and lashed his tail, but he didn't move. The spot he was currently in was the best if he wanted to continue observing his younger brother, Gorsefoot. "I'm sort of busy right now," he said, trying to keep his tone friendly and professional. "Could you please leave?"

Flowerpaw gasped. "Rude!" she scoffed. "But that's okay too, handsome." Her pitiful attempts at flirting were seriously annoying Pebbleclaw right now. She slid in front of him, narrowing her eyes in what she must have thought was sensual and irresistible way. "Wanna meet up later?" she cooed. "You're cute."

This was too much. Pebbleclaw growled under his breath and stood up abruptly, lunging at the foolish she-cat and pinning her to the ground. He could barely stop himself from slicing her throat open, his bloodlust almost overtaking him again. A red haze tinged his vision and he pressed his paw down harder, almost cutting off her oxygen supply.

"S-stop!" cried Flowerpaw. "What are you doing? I was only..." The tortoiseshell pawed feebly at him, gasping for air. Her eyes dilated in fear as Pebbleclaw picked up the paw and immediately slammed it down, choking her even more. She started twitching.

Flowerpaw's friend sprang into action, knocking the sturdy tom off of Flowerpaw and landing in a defensive crouch in front of her. "Get away from her," she hissed. "Psycho."

Pebbleclaw started to respond, teeth bared, but then looked at Flowerpaw, a lump on the ground, massaging her throat. The anger disappeared, and he could only stare in shock and horror at what he had done.

_StarClan help me. I lost control again. _

Flowerpaw managed to get up and lean against her friend, coughing. They hobbled away together, the two apprentices throwing venomous glances over their shoulders at him. If looks could kill, well, StarClan help him. Pebbleclaw flopped down, shame burning in his ears and cheeks.

He'd almost killed an apprentice whose only crime was being annoyingly flirtatious. But more than that, he'd snapped. Again. It was the second time this moon. A cold fear snaked through his veins, turning his blood to ice and sending shivers up and down his spine. He contemplated what would've happened if he hadn't stopped in time or, worse, if he'd attacked his brother. The very thought of it turned his insides to mush.

Pebbleclaw sighed, sheathing his claws. It was no use thinking about things that couldn't change. With a start, he realized that the leaders had already finished all of their announcements and he hadn't heard a word they had said. Warriors were already getting up and starting to share tongues again.

He turned slightly, just so he could watch Gorsefoot a little better, when he caught something out of the corner of his eye.

It was a she-cat; nothing spectacular. Gray fur. Yellow eyes. Medium build, warrior size. Perfectly normal, except for the fact that she was sitting away from the rest of clans. Just like he was.

Curiosity, a new and foreign feeling to Pebbleclaw, blossomed in his chest. Why was she sitting apart from the rest of her clan like that? What atrocities had she committed? What made her the equal of he? He didn't particularly want to talk to a fish-breathed warrior, but the unanswered questions were too much for him to bear, plus the fact that he had found another outcast. He wanted to hear her story, so the tabby warrior padded over to the she-cat.

"Hello," he meowed, sitting down next to her. As he did so, their pelts brushed together, and the she-cat stiffened like she had been shocked with electricity.

"Hey," she replied, not even bothering to look at him. "Do I know you?"

"No. But I saw you sitting here, and..." Pebbleclaw's voice trailed off. He hadn't realized how awkward this would be. "Um, what's up?" He cringed at his awful attempt at casual talk, something he wasn't even close to proficient in.

"Oh, you know... the fish is swimming, rain is falling, I'm alive..."

"Er, alright."

There was a pregnant pause.

Pebbleclaw took a deep breath and decided to get it out. "Why are you sitting here by yourself?" he asked. "How come you aren't talking with your friends?"

"Friends? What are those?" she snorted, a wry smile appearing on her lips. "Nobody wants to get near me. I'm terminal. They're all afraid of how to speak to me. That's okay, though. They're all insensitive fish-brains, anyway."

Pebbleclaw winced at the brutal truth and racked his brain for things to say. He was going to apologize for the spunky she-cat's hardships,

but he knew from experience how empty the words "I'm sorry" could be.

"The disease is going to be sorry that it ever came upon you, judging by your personality," he offered. The she-cat purred, a low, raspy thing that Flowerpaw's meow couldn't even begin to compare to.

"Hey, thanks," she said. "I'm Stormpaw, by the way." She must have noticed the shock on Pebbleclaw's face, because she added, "I was supposed to be a warrior a couple moons ago, but my stupid illness got in the way. It's okay, though." Stormpaw shrugged. "Now it's my turn."

Pebbleclaw frowned, unease coursing through his blood. "Your turn for what?"

"To ask why you were sitting alone. I'm not blind, you know. I saw your clan avoiding you." Pebbleclaw winced inwardly, cursing under his breath.

"Ah, it's nothing. Just... you know..." He trailed off, looking into Stormpaw's skeptical eyes. "The clans are about to leave soon. I have to ru-"

"I saw how you attacked that RiverClan apprentice," Stormpaw interrupted calmly.

Pebbleclaw stiffened, his claws sliding out and tearing gouges into the dirt, a nervous habit he'd never managed to stop doing. "What?"

"It has something to do with that, doesn't it?"

"You're a nosy apprentice, aren't you?" the tabby growled, his former friendly air replaced with one of cold iciness. He got up to leave, but the gentle touch of Stormpaw's tail on his shoulder stopped him. It was tender. Gentle. He couldn't remember the last time somebody had touched him like that. It stopped him in his tracks.

"I'm sorry," said Stormpaw hesitantly, like she wasn't used to the words. "I didn't mean to- sorry. I was poking my nose around in personal stuff. It's fine if you don't want to tell me."

Pebbleclaw sighed and sat down. "...No, it's... it's... I'll tell you. And I understand if you hate me afterwards.

"I have anger issues. Really bad anger issues. And it's like... like I lose control sometimes. I break. Once I attacked an enemy warrior and-" Pebbleclaw drew in a long, shuddering breath, pulling a paw across his throat. Stormpaw winced. "And even my own clanmates. I've never killed them, but some I've scarred for life. Everybody's afraid of me."

"Why didn't Rabbitstar exile you?" Stormpaw asked, not bothering to dance around the subject with pleasantries and subject-changes. The brutally honest she-cat tipped her head to the side, shooting the WindClan warrior a questioning glance.

"He thought that I still had it in me to be great," Pebbleclaw admitted, heat flushing to his cheeks. "Rabbitstar thought that, with

some help, I could get over all the bad parts. That was two seasons ago. Obviously, he was wrong."

"Hey," said Stormpaw lightly, bumping against him, "it's okay. It could be worse. You could be dying slowly every day." She laughed, although her humor was tinged with sadness.

"Technically, we're all dying every day," the tom pointed out. "Don't think you're so special. I mean, we're alike in other ways too. Both neglected, left-out, the outcasts..." His voice trailed off, and the whole atmosphere suddenly became very gloomy. Pebbleclaw half-turned and saw that the clan leaders had jumped off of the oak tree.

Surprisingly, Pebbleclaw didn't want to leave. Stormpaw was practically the only cat he'd talked to in days, aside from his brother. Venting his feelings out... it felt good. Stormpaw seemed to feel the same way, lingering by his side for a few moments before padding away to join RiverClan.

"I'll see you at the next Gathering," he called out, waving his tail goodbye. He stayed there for another heartbeat before running to catch up with the rest of WindClan, a gentle breeze tickling his ears, his nose, his fur. A small smile broke out on Pebbleclaw's face as he raced back to camp. It was something that didn't happen often, but he liked it.

****Hellooo! More author's notes down here! /waves/ What do you think? Do you like it? Do you hate it? Constructive criticism is greatly appreciated! Thanks! Peace out- Infinite.****

2. Chapter 2

****Hello! Infinite here! Thanks for all the feedback ;w; I really appreciate it. This chapter was going to be longer, but then I was like, "Screw it. I could take the other half and make it another chapter." So yeah!****

****Review replies:****

****Shiverdream of Windclan: Aah, thanks so much :ooo****

****PerfectlyClearly: Thanks! Yes, I'm trying to keep them balanced, so I'm glad they're working : I also want to add in a couple more personality quirks for them, though.****

****Dewmist: Thanks, Misty!****

It took two more Gatherings before Pebbleclaw and Stormpaw trusted each other enough to meet in secret.

It was four days before they were supposed to meet up. Pebbleclaw's heart was thudding against his chest and he took a deep breath, hoping that it would calm his frayed nerves. Instead, his heart beat faster, racing like a rabbit.

It was a constant reminder that he was basically betraying his clan. Sneaking out of camp, meeting with somebody at the Island, talking

with an _enemy warrior_... Pebbleclaw's head spun, his fierce desire to remain loyal fighting against his want - no, his _need _- for companionship, for a friend he could laugh with and whisper secrets to. He unsheathed his claws, the pearly crescents sinking into the prey in front of him.

"Whoa there!" said Gorsefoot, alarmed. "What are you doing?"

Pebbleclaw looked down and realized that he'd basically shredded the bottom half of the rabbit without even realizing it. Heat flushed to his cheeks and he bent down to take a big mouthful.

"You seem nervous," his brother continued. "Is something wrong? You can tell me anything, you know." Gorsefoot blinked at him innocently, blue eyes round with worry.

"Nothing's wrong," Pebbleclaw replied, picking the rabbit bones clean. "It's just- you wouldn't understand."

Gorsefoot fluffed his fur out. "I would totally understand," he said, indignant. "Really! I would!"

_No, you wouldn't, _thought Pebbleclaw glumly. And it was true; Gorsefoot had never faced the same kind of discrimination that his brother had. He never had a shortage of loving and supportive friends. He wouldn't understand why Pebbleclaw was breaking the warrior code and risking exile to meet up with somebody.

"Forget it," growled Pebbleclaw, his eyes narrow slits. "I'm going hunting. And don't bother coming, either," he added, getting up. Gorsefoot looked hurt and crestfallen. For a moment a twinge of guilt chilled Pebbleclaw's heart, and so he sat down, sighing.

"Sorry, but... I just need some alone time, alright? I'll see you later." With that, Pebbleclaw left the camp, hoping that hunting would distract him from his nerves.

The tabby tom raced across the moor, the wind like tiny pieces of ice stabbing his eyes. Despite the bitter, unusually cold weather, he grinned. Hunting was Pebbleclaw's true love. He might be better at fighting, but there was pretty much no place he'd rather be than chasing a rabbit across the moor.

Almost as if he'd summoned it with his mind, a cottontail appeared, hopping down a slight indent in the moor. Pebbleclaw bunched his muscles together and used the springy ground as a launching board, sinking his fangs into the poor creature's neck. He promptly buried it and continued running.

Unfortunately, the rabbit was his only piece of prey all morning. He'd been across almost all of WindClan's territory. The only place left was near the ThunderClan border, which he didn't like hunting near because it harbored so many hairy squirrels and tough, stringy mice.

It was Pebbleclaw's only choice, though. He reluctantly slowed down his speed as he neared the border, panting, until he caught sight of a vole. Grimacing, he chased after it, slamming down a paw on its spine right on the border. The scarred tom winced at the messy

kill.

As he picked it up and was about to go back to collect the rabbit he'd caught earlier, a ThunderClan patrol of three blundered into the sparse woods.

The biggest one, a tough-looking white tom, snarled at him, his eyes filled with menace. "We saw you!" he yowled. "You took our prey!"

"What? No!" Pebbleclaw dropped the vole and backed away. "I chased it from WindClan territory!"

"Yeah, but you caught it on ThunderClan territory," argued the she-cat next to the tom. Her blue eyes were hostile and her gray fur was spiked. "It would have run onto here, which means that you technically just caught prey that could have fed ThunderClan cats."

"I don't- what? It's WindClan prey. Besides, I caught it on the border."

"You're wrong," snarled the white tom, stepping forward. "That's our prey. Give it back." Pebbleclaw frowned and looked at the third cat in the patrol, a plump ginger tabby who just stood there, head bowed.

"_She _isn't supporting your argument," Pebbleclaw pointed out, jabbing his tail at the ginger she-cat. He took a deep breath, struggling to keep his anger in check. "She must think you're wrong, which you are. I'm telling you, I caught it on the border."

"You're looking at Amberwing for support?" sneered the gray she-cat. "She can barely understand hunting and fighting. Her little kittypet brain can't keep up with the big-warrior talk. I have to say, though, you're a lot worse than her."

Pebbleclaw narrowed his eyes. "Shut up," he growled, dropping into an attack crouch. "It's my prey!"

"Oh yeah? Wanna fight for it, rabbit-head?" the she-cat taunted, bristling her fur. Pebbleclaw snarled at her, his eyes filling with rage. He lunged, claws scraping down the cat's spine, and was about to pull out a piece of the fleapelt's fur when something pushed him aside.

"N-no! Please, please stop!" The voice was small, shaky, soft. Pebbleclaw's rage faded and he turned to see the ginger she-cat, Amberwing, standing over him.

"StarClan!" she gasped. "You... you're hurt!" She looked at her clanmate. "Oh no! You're hurt too! Are you okay?" She dropped down to the gray she-cat's side, licking the wounds of the warrior who had insulted her no more than a few heart-beats ago. "This is terrible," she said, worry clear in her voice. "Those scratches are really deep."

The she-cat grunted and sat up, blood trickling out of the gash on her back. "I'm fine," she rasped. "Get off me."

"Why so rude?" growled Pebbleclaw, lashing his tail. "She just saved your life."

"Like I was in any danger," the gray cat retorted, licking her wounds. "Come on, Snowtail. Let's go. The WindClan warrior can have his prey. He certainly needs it, the scrawny rabbit-brain."

Pebbleclaw was on the verge of attacking them again when Amberwing placed her tail-tip on his shoulder.

"Please," she whispered, her eyes welling up, "just let it go. I don't like it when cats fight." She looked back; the two other cats had already left and didn't seem to notice that Amberwing wasn't with them.

The scarred tabby tom growled with frustration, claws tearing up the grass beneath him. "But... but they're terrible!" he stammered. "They made fun of you!"

"I know," she said quietly. "But I can't do anything about it."

Pebbleclaw looked at her, appalled. "Stand up for yourself!"

"I can't." Amberwing just barely breathed the words, and she stared down at her paws. "They hate me because I'm too soft and because I used to be a kittypet. There's not a lot I can do to change that. It's just who I am, and if they don't accept it--"

"If they don't accept it, it's their loss," interrupted Pebbleclaw. "Amberwing... I know how you feel." He was about to go on, ready to break into a deep, lengthy, and meaningful conversation in an attempt to make the she-cat feel better, but she cut him off.

"No, I don't think you do." Her voice was quiet but firm. Amberwing looked up, straight into Pebbleclaw's eyes. The battle-scarred tom was alarmed by her clear, flickering blue orbs. They were... off. Broken, hopeless, lonely, filled with sadness and despair. He involuntarily took a step back.

"I--"

"I think..." The ginger she-cat turned around. "I think it's time for you to go. I-I'm sorry. I can't- I'm sorry. You can keep the vole you caught earlier." She blinked at him, sorrowful, before taking off, leaving Pebbleclaw confused and angry. Angry at himself.

He stood there, stone-still, for some time after she left before he finally moved.

"Ugh! You idiot!" Pebbleclaw slammed his claws against a nearby oak tree, raking them down with such vengeance that the bark was almost shredded. "One good friend in another clan and suddenly you think you think you have the power to talk to anybody? To help them? To make them like you?" The tabby tom's temper was raging, a miniature hurricane that turned him into a violent, destructive machine. "Stupid, stupid rabbit-brain! Fox-pelt! Flea-bag!"

He slammed his head against the tree, adrenaline coursing through his

veins. "Idiotic mouse-heart!"

Pebbleclaw collapsed against the base of the tree, panting. His claws were sore and one was almost torn out. Blood, the sweet, metallic life of the battlefield, trickled down his leg from when he had rammed himself into the tree.

But this wasn't the battlefield, was it? Groaning, he picked himself up and hobbled back to camp with the vole in his jaws, wondering what he was supposed to tell the medicine cat. He couldn't very well go and say, "I attacked a really tough oak tree and got into a skirmish with a ThunderClan patrol." Ears tingling with shame, he padded into the WindClan camp and headed straight for the medicine cat, head hung low.

Thankfully, he didn't have to come up with an excuse as to why he was scratched and bleeding. The medicine cat, Berryfrost, provided a perfect one while treating him.

"Got stuck in a thornbush, did you, Pebbleclaw?" the cream she-cat meowed cheerfully. The brown tabby nodded guiltily. "Those scratches should take a couple days to fully recover," she continued. "But that torn claw... maybe half a moon?" She squinted. "Dunno. It depends. But take it easy, alright?"

Pebbleclaw nodded numbly as Berryfrost wrapped his claw with foul-smelling herbs and shooed him out. As soon as he stepped into the camp, covered with cobwebs and marigold, several of his nearby clanmates shrunk back. He ignored it and walked to the fresh-kill pile, bumping into one of the new apprentices on the way.

"O-oh! Pebbleclaw!" Sagepaw squealed, eyes wide with fright, obviously expecting for the warrior to lose his temper and attack him. "I'm sorry! I'm so s-sorry! I didn't mean-"

"It's fine, Sagepaw," Pebbleclaw replied wearily. "It was an accident."

"Of.. of course!" Sagepaw slunk away into the apprentice's den, whispering quickly to his sister, Goldenpaw. She narrowed her eyes at Pebbleclaw and hissed at him. The tom sighed, trying to ignore her hateful glare.

Pebbleclaw ate the vole that he had caught earlier and settled down next to Gorsefoot. It was the only place that he was welcome in the clan. His younger brother was going on, clearly excited about something, but Pebbleclaw wasn't listening. He closed his eyes and lay down.

Just four more days until you can meet with Stormpaw, Pebbleclaw. You can do this.

Soo... now you meet Amberwing! She's one of my favorite characters in this story so far hehe :P You'll learn more about her later. Also, I wanted to show how Pebbleclaw's clanmates interact with him. It's not going to be his perspective for all the chapters, by the way. As always, be sure to leave some feedback! Constructive criticism is greatly appreciated! Peace out - Infinite

3. Chapter 3

****Hey! I would have updated earlier, but I wanted to put review replies and the reviews were glitching and not showing up :P Plus, I wanted to add some stuff. Review replies:****

****PerfectlyClearly: Aah, cool ;w; and thank you! c:****

****Dewmist: haha yeah, I think people (and maybe cats?) tend to focus on the bad stuff in general rather than the good things. And thanks! :D****

****Willowdream of ForestClan: Thank you so much!****

****ALSO, BE WARNED. THIS CHAPTER MENTIONS ABUSE. PROCEED WITH CAUTION. ****

Water clung to Stormpaw's whiskers in icy cold droplets, her fur stiff and freezing to the touch. Of course, the very night that she planned to sneak out happened to be the coldest and rainiest of the season.

The RiverClan apprentice shook herself back and forth, sending a spray of water across the camp. Most of it landed on Mistyfang, a senior warrior, who lifted her head up from her fresh-kill and started peeling her lips back into a snarl before seeing who the water came from. Instantly, she shrunk back, looking slightly guilty. Stormpaw let out a huff of exasperation and rolled her eyes. Warriors in the camp couldn't even get angry at her normally, all because of her stupid disease.

The rain, which had at first been just an annoying drizzle, suddenly grew heavy enough to be considered a downpour. Stormpaw let out a cry of surprise as the rain hammered against her pelt, soaking her down to the bones and turning her into a lump of ice. She quickly ducked into the medicine cat den, which was the one closest to her, and was immediately surrounded by the familiar musty scent of herbs.

Twigwhisker was sitting in the corner, back facing the entrance as she sorted some herbs. Upon hearing Stormpaw's friendly but shaky meow of greeting, however, she turned.

"Oh, Stormpaw! Hello! What were you doing out in the rain? You could've caught a bad cold, you know." The tortoiseshell medicine cat fretted over the gray apprentice, ushering her to the back of the den before cloaking her shoulders and chest with moss. "That was extremely irresponsible, Stormpaw. You know that dampness and cold don't go well with your illness. They'll just make you sicker and sicker."

Despite it all, Stormpaw couldn't help but let out a mrow of amusement. "Twigwhisker, stop. I'm fine." It's nice knowing that I have somebody looking out for me, though, she added silently. Her parents, upon hearing of her terminal illness, had distanced themselves from her to avoid being entirely brokenhearted when she died.

"Oh, I know. It's just that I care about you." Twigwhisker gave Stormpaw's ears a few motherly licks before sitting down, looking at

the apprentice fondly. "I just wouldn't be able to bear it if you died, all because of a night out in the rain."

"I'm fine, I'm fine!" Stormpaw purred, heat flushing to her cheeks. "Um, I'll have to go out a bit again, though."

"What?" Twigwhisker stared at her, astounded. "Are you delirious?" She pressed a tortoiseshell paw against Stormpaw's forehead and sniffed her nose, wrapping her body around Stormpaw's. "You seem okay. But why do you want to go out? It's pouring! And you haven't taken the daily herbs for your illness yet."

"It's just... just some personal business. It's nothing. I have to check on some stuff, and the medicine can wait until later." Stormpaw winced inwardly at the lie and swore to herself that she would make it up to Twigwhisker later. Somehow. "I'll be back soon. Promise."

The tortoiseshell she-cat narrowed her eyes, suspicious. There was a long, awkward pause before Twigwhisker finally dipped her head. "Alright."

Stormpaw struggled to hide her smile. "It'll only take a little while," she said, wriggling out of Twigwhisker's grip and backing out of the den, into the rain. The medicine cat nodded, turning away and going back to sorting her herbs.

The gray apprentice winced as she fully emerged from the den. The water was like a million tiny claws being hurled at her, digging into her pelt and chilling her bones. Stormpaw slunk forward, hiding under the trees, as she exited the camp.

The guard at the exit was Whiterose; friendly but absentminded. Always a bit slow. Stormpaw mumbled some excuse about taking a walk in the rain and the white she-cat nodded enthusiastically, though her gaze was blank and spacey as always.

Once out of the camp, Stormpaw dashed through the marshy plains and weeping willows, heading straight for the Island. As she approached it, though, she began to have second thoughts. What if Pebbleclaw couldn't make it through all the rain, or worse, turned out to be a dangerous tom who only wanted to meet up alone to... to... She couldn't finish the thought.

I trust Pebbleclaw.

I have to.

She skidded to a halt as she approached the tree-bridge, panting, her sweat mixing with the cold rain and sending tingles up her body. Stormpaw hesitantly stepped onto the bridge and almost fell off, her paws slipping to the side so that she had to dig her claws into the bark to avoid dropping into the water. Though she was a RiverClan cat, she didn't relish the idea of swimming through the pounding surf and pouring rain. She narrowed her eyes, squinting to make out the vague outline of the Island against the inky night.

Stormpaw bunched her muscles and jumped, unable to see where she was going.

Her forepaws hit the rocky shore of the Island before slipping back, her body dropping into the water. Her muscles screamed as Stormpaw struggled to get back onto land. The tide was almost too strong; it sucked her into the water, a sharp, vicious tug, before spitting her back out so that her body scraped against the sand. Being a RiverClan warrior made almost no difference to her in these tough waters. Her disease, which attacked her heart and lungs, made her unable to exert herself for too long, and she was soon exhausted.

The apprentice gasped as a particularly strong wave pushed her forward. She seized the chance and flopped onto the shore, her body numb and covered in shallow scrapes.

Stormpaw cursed herself. A RiverClan cat almost beaten by a couple strong waves! She continued to mutter curses and swears under her breath as she struggled to get into the shelter of the trees. Lightning momentarily lit up the sky, illuminating the oak tree and... and the lone figure of a cat sitting on the roots, eyes gleaming. A loud clap of thunder made her jump as she half-walked, half-crawled to the tree.

"Pebbleclaw!" she wheezed, her lungs suddenly constricting in her chest from her overexertion earlier. "Is that you?"

The figure turned and saw her as another bolt of lightning lit up the sky. "Stormpaw!" The voice was faint and far-away, but it was definitely him. "What are you- do you need help?" Pebbleclaw jumped down from the roots and padded towards her.

"N-no!" she spluttered. "Of course not! Wait there!" Stormpaw somehow managed to struggle her way over to the battle-scarred tom, coughing and gasping for air.

"Stormpaw, are you okay? What-" Pebbleclaw's eyes darkened. "It's your disease, isn't it?"

"Y-yes," Stormpaw wheezed, cursing herself yet again for refusing to take her daily herbs in Twigwhisker's den earlier. "I'm fine, though. Just a little... I'm okay. Don't worry."

"Alright," Pebbleclaw said hesitantly. "So, um, what do you want to talk about?"

"Erm..." Stormpaw shrugged. "I don't know. I guess I didn't really plan this far." She fiddled with her paws uncomfortably.

"We don't have to talk then," Pebbleclaw suggested. "We can just sit together and... listen. To the rain, I mean."

"Sure."

The awkwardness in the air was almost too much for Stormpaw to bear. Impulsively, she leaned into Pebbleclaw, shoving her side against his. The tom stiffened at first, but then relaxed, sinking into the position. They stayed like that for a while, just listening to the rain and watching the darkness.

More lightning illuminated the Island, and for a moment, Stormpaw was sure she had seen a feline figure. Then she shook her head, dismissing it as something made up in her head. But then she realized

that, yes, something _was _moving across the tree-bridge. She tensed up, holding her breath.

"What's wrong?" Pebbleclaw murmured, eyes wary.

Stormpaw got up and squinted into the darkness. "There's somebody there," she said. A distinctly feline figure was staggering towards them, and the rich, musky scent of forest and soil flooded Stormpaw.

"ThunderClan," Pebbleclaw whispered, tensing his muscles. "What-?"

"I don't know."

The cat came into view, and now Stormpaw could see them clearly. A she-cat, her amber fur sopping wet, the delicate tabby stripes and spirals of her pelt mashed into one indescribable mess in the rain. She was staggering in their direction, wobbling back and forth on shaky legs.

Stormpaw stepped forward hesitantly. "Hello?" she asked. "Who are you- mmf!" She let out a muffled shriek as Pebbleclaw slapped his tail in front of her mouth and dragged her into some nearby bushes.

Once inside the leafy bushes, Pebbleclaw let go of her. Stormpaw glared at him, swiping her tongue around her jaws and spitting out fur.

"What was that for?" she hissed. "Why did-"

"Shh." Pebbleclaw looked at her, eyes even more solemn than usual. "If the she-cat sees us... the rain won't do too much to hide our different clan scents, or the fact that we're meeting in secret. She'll be suspicious. Maybe report it to our clan leaders." He slid his claws out and lashed his tail, clearly agitated. "Oh, StarClan," he moaned. "Why did I ever agree to this? We'll be exiled!"

Stormpaw rested a paw on his shoulder. "It'll be okay," she whispered. "The cat, whoever they are, won't find us, and they won't know who we are, anyway. We'll be-" She quickly broke off as she heard the extremely nearby sound of claws clicking against stone.

Pebbleclaw looked at her, eyes narrowed, clearly regretting his decision to break the Warrior Code. _She's by the rocks, _he mouthed, fear and anticipation in his gaze. Stormpaw rolled her eyes, not even needing to mouth the words for the message to get across. _Duh!_

The bushes were suddenly pulled apart. Stormpaw gasped as the ginger she-cat thrust her head into the bushes. She scrabbled back, bumping into Pebbleclaw, whose claws poked into her pelt.

"W-who are you?" The strange she-cat's voice was entirely different from what Stormpaw had expected; instead of being the low, gravelly voice she had presumed would belong to a warrior out all by herself on such a night, it was high, shaky, and sweet, like a delicate rosebud just about to bloom.

Before Stormpaw could respond, Pebbleclaw shouldered his way to the front of the bush. "Amberwing?" he said, clearly astonished.

The ginger she-cat, Amberwing, blinked her watery blue eyes. "You!" she gasped. "You're... you're the tom..."

Pebbleclaw dipped his head. "Pebbleclaw at your service," he murmured, avoiding her gaze. "What are you doing here?"

Amberwing looked down at her paws, fidgeting with a broken piece of grass. "I was, erm, taking a midnight walk," she mumbled. "And I-"

"Wait. Hold up." Stormpaw raised her tail, narrowing her eyes at Amberwing. "You're ThunderClan! To get here to the Island, that means you walked through WindClan territory."

"...Well..." Amberwing sighed, turning her body slightly so that only one side of her was visible. "Yes. I went through WindClan territory. I'm sorry," she added, finally lifting her gaze from her paws to look at Pebbleclaw. "But I couldn't sleep... and it was a one-time, impulsive type of thing. My clanmates didn't even notice when I left. The rain washed away all traces and-"

"No," Stormpaw interrupted again. "This isn't your first time doing this, is it?" Her eyes were clouded with suspicion. "You don't strike me as the kind of cat to take such a risk and pass through WindClan territory just to come here. No." Her eyes met Amberwing's. "You planned this out. How often do you sneak out a moon?"

Amberwing hesitated, her eyes filled with guilt and fear. "A-Alright," she said. "I take midnight walks every third day." Pebbleclaw had to stifle a gasp. "Terrible of me, I know. But it's become sort of a habit. Besides," she added, some of the self-doubt in her eyes suddenly replaced by a twinkle of pride, "I'm good at hiding away and shutting up."

Stormpaw sensed that there was something significant about the sentence, but brushed it off. She opened her mouth to say something, but Pebbleclaw gave her a fierce look and she closed it again.

"What were you saying before about what you were doing here?" Pebbleclaw asked.

"I don't usually go onto the Island itself," confessed Amberwing. "Mostly I just stay behind and look at it, especially if it's rainy and the tree-bridge is s-slippery." Stormpaw winced, remembering her own battle with the water and the bridge. "But tonight I saw two figures on the Island, and was afraid that they were lost, cold rogues. I... I only wanted to help." She turned, accidentally revealing the side of her face she'd kept hidden for the entire conversation.

Stormpaw gasped and shrunk back. A nasty gash, still dripping blood, ran from the bottom of Amberwing's eye to her chin, a three-pronged claw mark that would no doubt take a long, painful moon to heal. At least.

"Wh-what?" asked Amberwing nervously.

"Who did that to you?" growled Pebbleclaw, jabbing his tail at her scratch. Amberwing's eyes widened in horror and she turned again.

"What... what are you talking about?" She gave a nervous laugh. "I don't... it's nothing. A skirmish with a f-fox."

"Those scratches are too neat and precise to have been done by a fox," Stormpaw pointed out. Amberwing flattened her ears against her head.

"Fine. I'll... tell you. Please don't think p-poorly of me." Amberwing took a deep breath, and Stormpaw could have sworn that she saw a few glittering tears in the corners of her eyes. "I... it was my mate. Kestreltail. He-he wanted... kits..." The ginger tabby burst into tears, fat crystals dripping down her cheeks and mingling with the blood of her wound. "We tried so, so hard, but each time, the medicine cat would say that it hadn't worked. There were no kits. And-and-" She turned away, a small puddle of reddish-clear water at her feet.

Stormpaw would've liked to comfort her and say that it was perfectly fine, that there was no need to go on if it was making her upset, but... the truth was, Stormpaw, like most cats, had the deep desire for dark, dirty secrets.

"And after that?" Stormpaw prodded her.

"Each time that happened, Kestreltail w-would scratch me and tell me it was all my fault that there were no kits." She gestured towards her faintly scarred shoulders and at the clawmark scars on her paws. Stormpaw and Pebbleclaw both let out faint gasps. "A-and then..." Amberwing gulped. "Then, this very morning, the medicine cat took me into her den. She was quiet and gentle. Too... gentle. That was where she told me a-about me being..." The she-cat started sobbing. "She told me I was infertile, that I would never have kits. Ever."

"Oh..." Stormpaw winced. "That really sucks."

"That's an understatement," Pebbleclaw growled under his breath. "I'm so sorry," he added, looking at Amberwing.

"N-no. Don't be sorry." Amberwing shook her head fiercely. "I never wanted kits. It was all Kestreltail's idea. A-and I was afraid that.. if I did have them, my poor kits would have to deal with that m-monster of a tom for a father." She looked at them earnestly, pain clouding her gaze. "In a way, it was a blessing from StarClan. But when I told Kestreltail, he got r-really angry. He attacked and scratched me on my face. It was the f-first time he'd clawed me there before. He always made sure to do it in somewhere that it wouldn't be too noticeable."

"Didn't your clanmates notice?" Stormpaw asked, surprised, as Pebbleclaw stretched forward to nuzzle and comfort Amberwing. "I mean, surely they couldn't think that you kept accidentally hurting yourself or something."

"They did," said Amberwing quietly, "but either they didn't care or they were afraid to approach me. Having a mate like Kestreltail... it

really marks you different, doesn't it? Suddenly, everybody is awkward around you. They don't know what to say, for fear of slipping up about it all and ruining everything."

"That's exactly how I feel," remarked Stormpaw, eyes widening.

"I can relate," Pebbleclaw agreed quietly.

Amberwing gave them a weak smile. _This she-cat is braver than she would at first seem, _Stormpaw realized. _She smiles, even as her darkest secrets are revealed and her life is crumbling on the inside._

"My clanmates taunt me," Amberwing said. "They h-hide behind the excuse that it's because I'm soft-hearted kittypet. Not so." Stormpaw had to bite down on her tongue to keep from yowling her outrage. How dare they tease this kind, sensitive _warrior_?

"Please... don't tell my mate I t-told you about this," Amberwing added quickly, her eyes darkening with fear. "He'd kill me. He would. He made me promise to never tell anybody."

"Of course not!" Stormpaw replied immediately. Pebbleclaw nodded. "But Kestreltail sounds like a fox-heart. Why don't you just leave him?"

"No. I can't," Amberwing sighed ruefully. "It's stupid of me, I know... but even after all these moons of torture, I still believe he loves me, in his own way. I don't- I don't want him to stop loving me."

"That's... not good," said Stormpaw.

"Yep."

"I know... but... I can't... thank you for listening to me anyway." Amberwing nuzzled both of them. "And I'm fine with the scratches. Really."

"Uh huh." Stormpaw tilted her head to the side.

Amberwing flustered, stammered out, "The sun's s-starting to rise. We've b-been here all night. I should g-go. Thank you." With a start, Stormpaw realized that her words were true.

"Fish guts!" Stormpaw muttered. "I've been gone all night."

"Same," Pebbleclaw hissed. "I should get going. My clan will be suspicious. Goodbye!" His last few words were a blur as he dashed out of the bush. Stormpaw and Amberwing stared at each other for a moment, smiling slightly, before parting ways.

Hi! Thanks for making it to the end, haha. I have a question: what are the characters to you? I mean, what are their personalities like to you? This is just to see if they match up with how I'm trying to write them :3 As always, feedback and constructive criticism is appreciated! Peace out - Infinite

****Hey guys! Sorry I didn't update earlier; school has been pretty crazy recently, especially with our finals drawing closer!

****Review replies:****

****PerfectlyClearly: Haha, yeah xD Thank you! I should probably practice writing transitions more, and the rain had mostly stopped by the time they finished talking!****

****Willowdream of ForestClan: Thank you so much! c:****

****Twinkle Legacy: Thank you for both your compliment and the feedback on the characters!****

****Dewmist: Me too, actually xD I definitely will! ****

****guest: Wow, thank you so much! :o That means a lot to me, both your thoughtful comment and your feedback on the chatracters!****

****(I feel like I use exclamation marks _waaaay _too much xD - also this emoticon. /shrug/ oh well!)****

"No, no, no! You're doing it all wrong!" Yellowstripe gnashed his teeth in frustration as his apprentice failed to dodge his blow in time. "Again!" he demanded, lashing his tail. "And faster this time!"

Stormpaw hissed as her mentor sprang at her again, and she scrabbled back, panting. Yellowstripe's paw still managed to clout her over the ear, however.

"You have to be faster," Yellowstripe growled. "Do it again! And after this, you're running around the camp twice!" He jumped, catching Stormpaw by surprise as he bowled her over into one of the trees of the Training Hollow, hind legs pummeling her stomach.

"Y-Yellowstripe," Stormpaw gasped. "It's almost sundown. We've been training for almost the entire-"

"Did I hear you complaining?" Yellowstripe narrowed his eyes at her. "You know what happens when my apprentice complains."

Stormpaw winced as she remembered a day where she'd whined about hunting from sunrise until sunhigh. Yellowstripe had her running around the camp over and over until she'd gotten so exhausted that she passed out, right in the middle of camp. "No, Yellowstripe."

And if she'd said just that, that would've been it. If she'd just kept her temper in check, she would have been safe.

But she couldn't help it. "I think you need to get your ears checked. After all, you're clearly mishearing me," she added.

The golden-and-white tom glared at her, ears pressed flat against his head. "Alright, I've had enough of you!" he hissed. "You're going on the border patrol this evening, and we're having extra training practice tomorrow! Is that understood?"

"Whatever you say." Stormpaw rolled her eyes, though she was inwardly groaning at the prospect of patrols and more training.

* * *

><p>The evening was hot and humid. Stormpaw lifted her muzzle to the air, sighing.<p>

"Rain's coming soon," Twigwhisker murmured, stealing a glance at the apprentice. "Are you sure you have to go out on patrol tonight? I could talk to Yellowstripe, convince him to put you on patrol tomorrow."

"I'm fine," Stormpaw said stiffly. She watched as her mentor organized the evening patrols, all while shooting her an icy glare. "Now, if you could talk to Mallowstar and convince him to change my mentor-

"Stormpaw!" Twigwhisker gasped, affronted. "Yellowstripe is a good mentor! He's taught you so many skills, and besides, he's the clan deputy. Isn't it an honor to have him for a mentor?"

"...I guess." The gray she-cat stared moodily out at the camp, her muscles tense. "I should go. _Yellowstripe _needs me on the patrol."

"Stormpaw-

But she'd already left the medicine cat den. Twigwhisker sighed, shaking her head as she watched Stormpaw stalk over to where the deputy was organizing his patrols.

"Glad to see you could join us, Stormpaw," Yellowstripe said coldly. "You're on the evening patrol with Tansyfrost, Blackfeather, and me."

"You're on the patrol too?" Stormpaw asked, feeling her heart drop. She was hoping to spend some time away from her mentor to cool down from their argument earlier. "But-

"Let's go." Yellowstripe lifted his tail up, and Stormpaw and the other warriors chosen for the patrol followed him as he left the camp.

The earth underfoot was moist, soft, and squishy, and Stormpaw shuddered each time she took a step. It felt like she was walking on a pile of worms or maybe even fresh-kill. All the birds were silent, and Stormpaw didn't even hear the grasshoppers that were always chirping away, especially on a warm evening like this. It placed a strange, uneasy doubt in her chest. One might even call it fear. A terrible premonition that something bad was going to happen.

As they began to approach the ShadowClan border, however, Stormpaw dismissed it as something silly. _Don't be such a kit, _she scolded herself. _All the animals are hiding from the rain. We're the only ones fish-brained enough to be out here right before a storm!_

Her thoughts were interrupted as Yellowstripe held up his tail and halted. Stormpaw stumbled at the sudden stop and crashed into

Blackfeather, who turned around and let out an annoyed hiss.

"Quiet," Yellowstripe murmured, his eyes alert. "There's somebody... over there! ShadowClan cats!" The tom flattened himself against the ground and slid forward, barely making a sound. The rest of the patrol followed suite, sliding along the dirt towards the other cats.

Stormpaw blinked as the scent of ShadowClan momentarily overwhelmed her. She made a face and held her breath against the strong, pines-and-earth smell of the other clan.

There were two of them. Both toms. One was a brown tabby who looked to be slightly older than Stormpaw, and the other was gray with patchy fur and scarred shoulders. Both were over the border, stalking a pair of mice.

Anger welled up within Stormpaw. "They're hunting over the border!" she whispered fiercely. Yellowstripe covered her mouth with his tail, staring intently at the two warriors.

The gray one pounced and caught both of the mice at the same time, his paws slamming down and breaking their backs. There was a faint squeak of pain and then nothing, as the warrior let out a satisfied purr.

At this, Tansyfrost sprang forward. "What are you doing?" she snarled, . The two warriors froze, caught in the act with guilty expressions. "That's our prey!"

"Well, it shouldn't be," the gray tomcat sniffed. "This area of land should belong to ShadowClan."

Blackfeather stepped in. "But as of right now, it's RiverClan territory." She shot a look back over her shoulder at Yellowstripe, who nodded at her to go on. "You need to get out of here," she continued. "And leave your prey here, too."

"What a joke," the gray tom snickered. "Come on, Bramblepelt. Care to put your opinion in and dumb down the whole conversation for this she-cat?"

"Of course I would!" The brown tabby, Bramblepelt puffed out his scrawny chest and took a step forward. "RiverClan patrol! We were hunting on your territory, yes, but... but!"

The gray tom rolled his eyes. "Yes?"

"But! We... deserve to!"

"Go on." The gray tom seemed to be amused.

"ShadowClan-"

"Alright, cut it out," Yellowstripe snarled, his fur bushed out. "Enough funny stuff. You were hunting across the border, and that's that. Either leave peacefully, or leave by force."

Bramblepelt started to respond, but then light suddenly seemed to

illuminate the entire clearing. Stormpaw gasped and stepped back, squeezing her eyes together against the harsh brightness.

"W-what's going on?" Blackfeather asked, a tremor in her voice.
"Did-"

"Twolegs!" It was the gray tom's voice this time, filled with horror and fear. "Run!"

Stormpaw opened one eye. Indeed, there was a twoleg standing there, holding a thin stick that somehow seemed to be the source of all the light. It meowed as it saw all of the cats, and lurched forward towards Yellowstripe.

The deputy hissed and backed away. The twoleg kneeled down and swiped at him. Yellowstripe growled and lashed out, leaving a thin pink scratch down the twoleg's arms. It yowled in pain and dropped the stick.

However, it continued on. The twoleg walked forward, towards Bramblepelt, who was quivering in fear.

"D-don't hurt me!" he yowled. "I know you don't want to! I'm... you don't want to! Please..." His whimpers died away as the twoleg picked him up.

"N-no! Please! No!"

The twoleg was taking out something long and thin, with a sharp, claw-like point at the edge. It appeared to be filled with a clear fluid. Bramblepelt was still begging for mercy as the twoleg jammed the point into him.

Bramblepelt yelped in pain, and instantly his frantic, scared movements slowed. His head dropped to the side, and within moments he was unconscious.

All the cats had watched on in horror up until this point, too terrified to move. But it was like Bramblepelt's unconsciousness triggered some invisible switch inside them. All the cats fled, running into the bushes and the trees.

The twoleg yowled and moved forward. Stormpaw gasped and ran, her paws throwing up bits of dirt and grass as she headed into RiverClan territory. Her heart thumped against her chest and her lungs suddenly constricted, her body telling her to slow down, to stop and take a break.

But she couldn't. She couldn't just stop and let the twoleg take her and... and... Pain shot through her body and Stormpaw stumbled, gasping for breath.

"N-no..." she mumbled.

"Stormpaw!"

The apprentice's head shot up. "Yellowstripe?"

"Stormpaw, run!" Yellowstripe crashed into her, pushing her forward, and the sound of twoleg feet crunching on twigs was near. Too near.

"Get up! It's right behind us!"

She wheezed, getting to her paws and attempting a jog. After the mad dash she had just been through, however, her body was worn out.

"Can't. Go.. on."

"No! You have to! Get up!" The golden-and-white tom grabbed Stormpaw's scruff, dragging her behind him as he moved in an awkward, slow gait.

"I'm slowing you down," Stormpaw said, her heart still hammering against her chest. "You-"

"No. I'm not leaving you behind; you're my clanmate and my apprentice!" Yellowstripe's voice suddenly hardened. "Now get up and _run_!"

Stormpaw struggled to her feet and limped forward, but her lungs and heart weren't cooperating and soon she couldn't breathe.

"T-Twigwhisker," Stormpaw whispered.

"No herbs, Stormpaw. Go, and that's an order!"

"I can't move, fish-brain!" Stormpaw exploded suddenly. "I can't! I'm slowing you down and you have to go without me, or-"

"Stormpaw, no." Yellowstripe was about to say more, but then the frenzied yowls of the twoleg were heard and he dropped into a defensive stance. "It's here."

"Yellowstripe-"

"I'm staying right here, Stormpaw! I can't leave my clanmate!" Yellowstripe lashed his tail as the twoleg appeared, waving around the light-stick. It spotted the two cats and bent down, arms extended. Yellowstripe snarled and lunged forward.

The tom barreled into the twoleg, pushing it down onto its behind. Yellowstripe hissed and scratched its arm.

The twoleg screamed in pain and grabbed Yellowstripe, who was spitting with rage. The tom landed another blow, this time on the twoleg's face. It fell back and groaned, arms instinctively lashing out. The light-stick hit Yellowstripe's head. Hard. Stormpaw watched in horror as her mentor went limp, blood trickling from where the light-stick had struck him.

"Yellowstripe!" Stormpaw cried, panic welling up in her chest at the sight of her unconscious mentor. "No!"

The twoleg heard her meows and turned, Yellowstripe held roughly against its chest with his head lolling forward. Stormpaw shrunk back at first, but then an image came to her mind: Yellowstripe snarling and swiping at the twoleg defiantly, a twisting golden blur as he fought to protect his clanmate.

Rage bubbled up in Stormpaw's heart, spilling forth in an angry fire. She screeched and jumped, landing on the twoleg's knee. It yowled and tried to shake her off, but Stormpaw held on, claws sinking into skin. She clambered up its side, hissing. Thunder rumbled in the

distance and rain began to fall from the skies, distracting the twoleg and further giving the RiverClan apprentice an advantage.

For a moment, Stormpaw felt like she was winning. Her adversary was bleeding, wet, and yelping in pain; she herself was unharmed and ready to roll.

But then the twoleg grabbed her neck and raised its furless paw. The stick with the claw-like point at the end glinted in the moonlight, the liquid inside shaking gently back and forth.

"No!" Stormpaw squirmed around and tried to escape from its grip, but the twoleg was strong. The point was plunged into her body, and Stormpaw screamed in pain as the twoleg yanked it back out, squeezing her neck with a vengeance. There was a hot, fiery flash of pain, and then the world started spinning around, drops of rain splattering onto her fur, before it all condensed into one dark hell-hole of nothingness.

**Sorrynotsorry. Really though... As always, thanks for reading!
Constructive criticism is always appreciated~ Peace out! -
Infinite**

End
file.